

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION
FOR
FLEXIBLE MAIL DELIVERY SYSTEM AND METHOD
BY
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DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/239,926, entitled "FLEXIBLE PARCEL DELIVERY SYSTEM AND METHOD," filed on October 13, 2000, the disclosure of which is expressly incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

Field of the Invention

[002] The present invention relates to dynamically changing the delivery point of an item while the item is en route to a destination. More particularly, the invention relates to methods and systems for dynamically redirecting an item, such as a parcel, to a new delivery point, flexibly specified, before the parcel is delivered to the originally addressed delivery point.

Background of the Invention

[003] In today's conventional delivery systems, the sender of an item, for example, a parcel, places the recipient's name and address on the item to specify the delivery point, and gives it to a delivery service to deliver. While the item is en route to the delivery point, conventional delivery systems often allow the sender of an item to track the item's progress from the sending point to the delivery point. Such systems typically use a unique identification tag, such as a bar code label, to identify the item and track it. As the item passes through various locations along the route to the delivery point, the tag is scanned and information regarding the item's

current location is updated. Using the tag's identification number, the sender can access the current location information and follow the progress of the item.

[004] Some conventional systems also allow a recipient to track an item en route to the recipient's delivery point, if the recipient knows the identification tag number associated with the item. For example, if a person purchases an item online or via the telephone, the seller may provide a "tracking number" for the item, with which the buyer can learn the item's current location en route. The buyer may use the delivery service's web site, or call a telephone number to learn the current location of the item.

[005] Several problems exist, however, with today's conventional delivery systems. First, conventional delivery systems are typically inflexible regarding timing of deliveries --the delivery service simply brings the item to the delivery point when it is convenient for the deliverer. This is inconvenient for the recipient and causes missed deliveries if the recipient is unable to wait at the delivery point according to the deliverer's schedule. If the recipient cannot arrange to wait for delivery, they must either pick the item up from the delivery service or arrange a new delivery time.

[006] Second, conventional systems deliver to a single static delivery point that is specified at the time of shipping when the sender places the recipient's name and address on the item being shipped. This is inconvenient and inefficient if the recipient cannot be at the delivery point when the delivery service arrives with the item. When this happens, delivery is delayed as the delivery service must keep the item and attempt to contact the recipient to arrange redelivery at a different time. Naturally, a recipient would prefer delivery to a location where he can accept it.

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